United Nations S/2004/228

Security Council

Distr.: General
19 March 2004

Original: English

Twenty-first report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1492 (2003) of 18 July 2003, by which the Council requested me to report at regular intervals on progress made on the benchmarks that should guide the drawdown of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and in the planning of subsequent phases of the Mission's withdrawal. In the same resolution, the Council welcomed my proposal to submit additional recommendations in early 2004 concerning a possible residual United Nations peacekeeping presence in Sierra Leone after the termination of the UNAMSIL mandate, which under the current drawdown plan, is scheduled to take place in December 2004. An interdepartmental assessment mission led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations visited Sierra Leone from 9 to 19 February 2004 to evaluate the benchmarks and collect the information needed to develop those recommendations. The findings of the assessment mission and my recommendations concerning a possible residual United Nations peacekeeping presence are provided in chapters II and V, respectively, of the present report.

II. Assessment mission

2. The assessment mission comprised representatives of the Department of Political Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office in West Africa. In carrying out its task, the assessment team pursued an approach that included an evaluation of the benchmarks and the security situation, as well as other important aspects of the overall peace consolidation and national recovery process. The team met with a wide cross-section of Sierra Leonean and international stakeholders in the peace process and visited various parts of the country. President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and Vice-President Solomon Berewa received the mission in separate meetings and provided their assessment of the overall situation in the country and in the subregion, as well as the views of the Government on the withdrawal of UNAMSIL and a possible post-UNAMSIL peacekeeping presence. A team from the Economic Community of West African States travelled to Freetown

04-27025 (E) 220304

for consultations with the assessment mission. The findings of the mission are described in sections A to E below.

A. Status of United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone drawdown

3. The drawdown of UNAMSIL is currently proceeding according to the plan approved by the Security Council in its resolution 1492 (2003), which envisages the withdrawal of the Mission to be completed by December 2004. Under the plan, UNAMSIL troop strength would be reduced from its current level of 11,500 to 10,500 in June 2004. Thereafter, further reductions would be implemented in September and/or October to bring the troop level down to 5,000, with a view to completing the withdrawal of the Mission by December. However, it should be recalled that the implementation of the last stages of the plan was predicated on an evaluation of progress made on the benchmarks, which is provided in the present report.

B. Progress on benchmarks

4. The Government of Sierra Leone, with the support of UNAMSIL and other bilateral and multilateral partners, has made significant progress in meeting some aspects of the benchmarks identified in my report to the Security Council of 5 September 2002 (S/2002/987). However, in many areas the progress made remains fragile, and some major gaps still remain, particularly with regard to the security sector. Much also remains to be done in the areas of consolidating State administration throughout the country and restoring government control over diamond-mining activities, as indicated in subsections 1 to 5 below.

1. Strengthening the capacity of Sierra Leone's security sector

5. During their discussions with the assessment team, President Kabbah, Vice-President Berewa and all concerned government ministers and heads of security agencies demonstrated an acute awareness of the need for the Government to assume responsibility for the country's security. In this regard, they explained in detail the steps being taken to prepare the Sierra Leone police and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) to take over responsibility for national security from UNAMSIL.

6. With the assistance of the United Nations civilian police component, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Commonwealth police training team, the Sierra Leone police force is making steady progress in building its capacity to assume full responsibility for internal security. The ultimate objective is to increase its full strength to its pre-war level of 9,500 officers through accelerated recruitment and fast-track training. To this end, UNAMSIL and the Commonwealth team are providing training for the new police recruits, as well as for trainers and police officers already in service.

7. To date, some 980 police recruits have been trained, bringing the strength of the Sierra Leone police to 7,115 as of February 2004. The newly trained police personnel are being deployed to the provinces, focusing on areas vacated by UNAMSIL and the sensitive diamond-mining and border areas in the east of the country. In addition, 4,000 middle-rank officers have benefited from in-service

training to help enhance the operational effectiveness of the police. At this stage, the Government has successfully re-established a police presence in all provincial and district headquarters and major towns throughout the country. As the police force attains full strength, the ultimate goal will be to deploy police personnel in each chiefdom.

8. UNAMSIL is also providing advice to Sierra Leone police in such key specialized areas as cross-border policing, airport security, criminal intelligence, policy and planning, family support and juvenile justice, while the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and UNDP are leading the efforts to equip the police and rehabilitate the police infrastructure throughout the country. With the support of UNAMSIL, the police force has now established a diamonds crime intelligence and investigation unit, but efforts to recruit a United Nations civilian police diamond adviser have not been successful.

9. Notwithstanding the remarkable gains achieved in training and equipping the Sierra Leone police, the overall assessment by UNAMSIL, the Government and the Commonwealth team was that the national police force is not yet fully capable of handling widespread public disturbances of a serious nature, particularly in Freetown and in the sensitive diamond-mining areas where there is a large concentration of unemployed youths and ex-combatants. In addition, deficiencies in infrastructure, especially the lack of accommodation and police stations, are impeding the police force's efforts to reinforce its presence in the strategic areas of the country, particularly in the east.

10. In this connection, the Government has indicated that there is a shortfall of $2.025 million in funding for the construction of police barracks and stations. Moreover, the target level of 9,500 officers will not be attained until mid-2005. It is envisaged that by December 2004, when the overall mandate of UNAMSIL is scheduled to terminate, the strength of the Sierra Leone police will have risen to only 8,300 officers. Corruption is also reportedly still fairly prevalent in some police units. However, considering the improved professionalism of the units and the general increase in confidence in the force, the Government is optimistic that, with continued support in funding for the construction of police stations and accommodation, as well as in training for both new recruits and serving officers, the benchmark relating to the capacity of the police could be met by mid-2005. The challenge then would be for the Government to sustain the police force, particularly in terms of salaries and maintenance of equipment.

11. With regard to RSLAF, the Government, with the support of the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), led by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has launched a contingency programme for building the operational capacity of the armed forces to assume responsibility for external security and to backstop the Sierra Leone police in maintaining public order. Those measures, which were launched in July 2003, include the deployment of three RSLAF brigades to the provinces and border areas; the ongoing restructuring of the armed forces, aimed at reducing their troop strength from the present level of over 14,000 to a sustainable level of 10,500; and forging a cooperative relationship between RSLAF, the National Security Council and the National Security Council Coordinating Group. The establishment of security and intelligence committees known as provincial and district security committees, which provide a framework for cooperation among Sierra Leone police, RSLAF and local authorities on security

matters at the district and provincial levels, and the construction of barracks for over 7,500 troops in the provinces and border areas, under a programme called Operation Pebu, also constitute a vital part of that effort.

12. UNAMSIL continues to conduct joint patrols and exercises with RSLAF and the Sierra Leone police (Operation Blue Vigilance), aimed at ascertaining progress in the operational capabilities of the two forces, particularly in Freetown and in areas along the border with Liberia. In addition to assisting in the training and restructuring of RSLAF, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has funded the construction of a staff college and a battle school at Daru. It is also refurbishing the Armed Forces Training Centre and has provided some vehicles and communications equipment for the army. The first cycle of the RSLAF training programme run by IMATT is scheduled to be completed in November 2005.

13. However, both President Kabbah and Vice-President Berewa, as well as senior officials of the Ministry of Defence, RSLAF, IMATT and UNAMSIL, informed the assessment mission that the contingency programme to prepare RSLAF to take over responsibility for the external security of the country has encountered difficulties and is behind schedule. The programme for the construction of army barracks, Operation Pebu, on which RSLAF capability depends, has been slowed by construction problems, a funding shortfall of some $2.5 million and the enormity of the task, and may not be completed until late 2005, possibly later. Furthermore, the RSLAF transport fleet is in a parlous state. Most of the vehicles donated by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland only two years ago are no longer usable due to lack of spare parts. Upon President Kabbah's instructions, the Ministry of Defence and the National Security Agency presented to the assessment mission a paper indicating that the armed forces urgently need, as a priority, some 108 light utility vehicles, 130 troop-carrying vehicles and 38 motorbikes, all at a cost of approximately $18 million.

14. The paper also indicated that there is a shortfall of $880,000 for priority communications equipment for RSLAF, and the President informed the assessment mission that the Government is now looking to UNAMSIL to donate some of its equipment to RSLAF as the Mission liquidates. There is also no funding available for the next phase of the restructuring exercise, under which some 1,000 soldiers are expected to go into voluntary retirement after receiving a financial and training package. Additionally, RSLAF is facing inadequate medical support, including shortages in medical personnel and supplies, as well as ambulances. The Government also needs a total of $510,000 to provide the basic essentials for the functioning of the provisional and district security committees, including transport and office equipment, as well as living and office accommodation.

15. The constraints described above have seriously impeded RSLAF preparedness to take over security responsibilities from UNAMSIL by the end of December 2004. Moreover, problems of poor discipline and morale continue to afflict RSLAF as it struggles to shed the bad image it acquired among the population during the war years. The overall assessment of all stakeholders, which is shared by the assessment team, was that RSLAF is yet to become a reliable component of the security structures that the Government is constructing at the national, provincial and district levels.

2. Reintegration of ex-combatants

16. The Government officially closed the initial programme for the reintegration of ex-combatants on 31 December 2003. A total of 51,000 individuals benefited from the medium-term reintegration assistance, such as the six-month skills training programmes, formal education and other training, as well as agricultural, fishery or entrepreneurial support. A residual caseload of some 3,500 ex-combatants who did not benefit from such projects will receive a one-time cash payment.

17. However, arrangements are also yet to be agreed for receiving, resettling and reintegrating Sierra Leonean ex-combatants who will be demobilized and repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Estimates of the number of those combatants range from 500 to 800 in Côte d'Ivoire and 500 to 3,000 in Liberia. There are also some 450 foreign combatants in Sierra Leonean internment camps who have to be repatriated to their countries. These combatants include nationals mainly of Liberia, but also of Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. In addition, some 168 Liberian children associated with the fighting groups were admitted to refugee camps in Sierra Leone and will need voluntary repatriation and reintegration support in Liberia. Several hundred family members of Liberian combatants are also considered refugees and are staying in Sierra Leonean refugee camps.

18. While the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have indicated that they are discussing these matters with Sierra Leone's National Commission for Social Action, the general attitude of the Government appears to be that the Sierra Leonean combatants who will be repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia are not entitled to any special treatment since they did not return during the Sierra Leone disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. The assessment mission encouraged the Government of Sierra Leone to open discussions with Côte d'Ivoire and the National Transitional Government of Liberia on this important matter. Meanwhile, there is widespread concern in Sierra Leone that many of the combatants who had been fighting for a considerable period of time in Liberia could create serious security challenges, as they are likely to avoid returning through an organized repatriation programme.

19. In the meantime, the Government of Sierra Leone, with the assistance of the World Bank, is making arrangements to conduct an assessment of the effectiveness of the overall disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. In this connection, it should be noted that the main objective of the just-completed programme in Sierra Leone was to provide ex-combatants with some skills through very short-term training, as well as tools and a minimum amount of financial resources to enable them to start a new life in civilian communities. As such, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme contributed immensely to the stabilization of the country in the immediate aftermath of the war. However, long-term community reintegration of the ex-combatants will depend on employment opportunities, which must come from sustained economic growth.

20. It is also generally acknowledged that women combatants did not adequately benefit from the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, particularly because the fast-tracking of the cantonment period resulted in a loss of focus on special programmes intended for women. No provision was made for female camp followers, most of whom had been abducted by the combatants. Women in this category feel stigmatized and have few options for improving their

i..es. It is estimated that some 1,000 women and girls who missed out on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are still living with former rebel commanders. Special programmes have been developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other agencies, which include counselling, family tracing, mediation and skills training, in order to assist this group.

21. Preliminary assessments by UNAMSIL indicate, however, that the majority of the 6,845 child combatants who were demobilized have now been reunited with their families. Some 3,000 have been absorbed into the community educational investment programme run by UNICEF. The Sierra Leone model for the demobilization and reintegration of child combatants is widely considered as success that could be applied to other peacekeeping operations. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the successful reintegration of children is a long-term process that requires sustained and continued support. Thus, current funding shortfalls in this area need to be addressed.

3. Consolidation of State authority

22. Government officials from the relevant line ministries have been deployed in all 12 administrative districts of the country, and paramount chiefs have returned to their chiefdoms. The 64 paramount chief posts that fell vacant during the conflict were filled through elections held from 2 December 2002 to 24 January 2003. The presence of a better-equipped and more disciplined national police force is now visible in the provinces and, as indicated earlier, district and provincial security committees are being set up throughout the country.

23. Magistrate courts have been rehabilitated in all districts, and they are now sitting in the district and provincial headquarters, albeit with inadequate coverage. The recruitment of judges and magistrates has been hampered by the existing unattractive conditions of service. There are only five magistrates assigned to service a total of 12 districts. As a temporary measure, justices of the peace have been trained, with the support of UNDP, and deployed to some 18 locations where they perform judicial functions under the supervision of those magistrates.

24. Considering that only two years ago the extent of Sta.e authority was limited to about one third of the country, the progress made in re-establishing government administrative, security and judicial structures throughout the country is remarkable. Nonetheless, the capacity of those structures to function effectively remains severely limited due to the lack of logistics, infrastructure and qualified personnel. There is also concern that the district councils expected to be elected in May will likely face similar constraints, which could render ineffectual the efforts to decentralize the functions of the central Government. However, the World Bank, the Department for International Development, UNDP, the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development have indicated that they would provide capacity-building support to the councils and to the decentralization process in general.

4. Restoration of government control over diamond-mining activities

25. The Government has taken important measures to reassert its control over diamond mining. In December 2004, the Cabinet approved a new core minerals policy that seeks to create an enabling legal, fiscal and institutional framework for the development of the country's mineral wealth and prevent the use of natural

resources to finance conflict and other illegal activities. Specific steps taken by the Government in this context include the establishment of a diamond crime, intelligence and investigation unit within the Sierra Leone police; vigorous law enforcement measures, including the deployment of mine monitors and wardens in mining areas; and incentives, such as the establishment of the Diamond Areas Community Development Fund, to encourage legal mining.

26. Furthermore, the 1994 Minerals Act has been amended to ensure stricter penalties for the illegal possession and smuggling of diamonds. In addition, UNAMSIL, jointly with the officials of the Ministry of Mineral Resources and the Sierra Leone police, conducted aerial surveys and ground patrols of mining areas throughout the country. The High-level Steering Committee on Diamonds also continues to coordinate efforts aimed at improving the governance and development of the diamond sector. As a result of these and other measures, the number of diamond-mining licences issued rose from 900 in June 2002 to 2,091 by the end of 2003, while official diamond exports increased from $10 million in 2000 to $76 million in 2003.

27. Nonetheless, the diamond sector still faces many serious challenges. More than 50 per cent of diamond-mining activities in the country remain unlicensed. In addition, diamond-mining rights and boundaries continue to be a major source of disputes among chiefdoms, and the large numbers of youths engaged in mining activities, as well as the largely unregulated power of chiefdom authorities to issue mining licences, present obstacles for potential investors. The use of child labour in the mines also continues to pose a serious challenge for Sierra Leone, despite the new policy prohibiting this practice.

28. The increase in legal mining activities, in particular the recent resumption of kimberlite mining in Koidu, is expected to have a positive impact on the country's economy. However, the concerns expressed by many Sierra Leoneans about the environmental impact of the kimberlite mining, as well as alluvial mining, should be seriously addressed by the Government. In addition, it should be emphasized that bringing diamond mining under effective control is a long-term effort that will also require active community involvement and international support.

5. Progress in resolving the conflict in Liberia

29. With the ongoing deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the situation in that country is gradually improving. However, the situation in the border areas remains unstable, since UNMIL has not yet deployed to contiguous areas on the Liberian side. Also, as indicated earlier, the handling of Sierra Leonean combatants who are in Liberia poses major challenges. In particular, there is concern that some of these combatants might relocate to other parts of the subregion.

30. Progress on the benchmark pertaining to the conflict in Liberia should be assessed in the context of the security situation in the wider Mano River Union subregion. On the whole, the Sierra Leonean population remains very uneasy about the situation in Liberia and apprehensive about the possible negative impact of future developments in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. On a positive note, President Kabbah informed the assessment team that the prospects for convening a Mano River Union summit in the coming months were promising. It is envisaged that the completion of disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration in

Liberia would greatly contribute to reducing the potential security threat along Sierra Leone's eastern border. Nonetheless, a continued deterrent presence and monitoring of border areas will be indispensable, considering the persistent cross-border issues.

C. Humanitarian situation and national recovery process

31. Humanitarian efforts in Sierra Leone have recently focused mainly on meeting the needs of resettling populations and the Liberian refugee population in the country, while national recovery efforts continued to focus on rebuilding communities and building both human and economic capacity to enable the Government and civil society to assume responsibility for the development of the country. On the humanitarian front, the national programme for the resettlement of internally displaced persons was officially completed in December 2002. Under the programme, more than 223,000 displaced persons were resettled over a period of less than 18 months. Some 250,000 Sierra Leonean refugees have so far been repatriated, over 157,000 of them with individual assistance from UNHCR. It is estimated that there are still some 33,000 Sierra Leonean refugees living in camps with UNHCR assistance in countries of asylum in the subregion. A further estimated 50,000 are living without assistance from UNHCR in communities outside the camps. UNHCR expects to complete the repatriation of all these refugees by the end of 2004.

32. Sierra Leone is also still hosting over 67,000 Liberian refugees. Some 55,600 from this caseload are accommodated in eight camps in the southern and eastern provinces of the country, while the rest live in towns and villages around the country, as well as in the border areas. Given the improving security situation in Liberia, UNHCR is planning to commence their voluntary repatriation from Sierra Leone by the end of 2004, provided that conditions in Liberia are conducive.

33. In order to address the challenge of meeting the remaining emergency relief and immediate recovery needs of war-affected persons, the United Nations country team has prepared a Transitional Appeal for Sierra Leone for 2004 consisting of three joint programmes, requesting a total of $61.9 million. The first two programmes are aimed at addressing the care and maintenance needs of Liberian refugees and some 30,000 Sierra Leoneans who are expected to return in 2004. The third programme focuses on community-based recovery and seeks to address the needs of resettling communities in areas of high vulnerability and with high levels of resettlement, which have yet to benefit from ongoing recovery efforts.

34. Considerable progress has been made in rehabilitating the social infrastructure, particularly schools and clinics. Schools have reopened in all parts of the country and programmes to train teachers have been launched. Primary school enrolment has increased by 70 per cent over the past two school years, and complementary rapid education programmes for youth have been expanded. The Government has set aside significant resources for a programme to increase the enrolment of girls in secondary schools, in particular in the north and east of the country. The main challenges in this area include the need for more schools, for adequate staffing and for supplies of teaching materials.

35. Health services have improved from a capacity level of 5 to 10 per cent during the war to 40 to 50 per cent at present. However, although most districts now have a functioning referral hospital, there are large populated areas in the country that still do not have adequate access to health services. Severe capacity constraints, including shortages of personnel and a lack of basic equipment and medical supplies, continue to impede further progress in this area.

36. The campaign to increase HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention is expanding, and progress has also been made in the areas of child protection and the rehabilitation of the country's war victims. There is now increased awareness of child protection issues, particularly with regard to sexual and economic exploitation. Emphasis must now be placed on enhancing the sustainability of existing social services by building the capacity of national agencies and rationalizing the network coordination on these issues.

37. The national economy continues to grow, and the gross domestic product target of 6.5 per cent for 2003 was achieved. The momentum for growth came largely from a broad recovery in agriculture, growth in diamond production, a modest increase in manufacturing output and an expansion in construction activities in both the public and private sectors.

38. In the agricultural sector, rice production reached 78 per cent of the pre-war level, which, however, represents only 50 per cent of current needs. This recovery was a result of a 47 per cent increase in the total area planted, due to increased access by farmers to their land, and an aggressive seed distribution programme, which saw 144,000 farmers receive 5,772 tons of rice. Other important food crops, such as cassava, sweet potatoes and groundnuts, also registered strong recoveries in 2003. The cultivation of cash crops, such as coffee and cocoa, which was abandoned during the war, is now being revived. In order to enable the agricultural sector to generate vital surpluses, farmers need improved varieties of crops, and the Government should initiate agrarian policy reforms, as well as road infrastructure development, to facilitate access to more productive areas of the country.

39. Mining in general, and diamond mining in particular, has historically made significant contributions to gross domestic product, when properly controlled. However, the process of reviving the industry is still nascent and its overall contribution to national economic recovery remains limited. Official diamond output doubled to 251,300 carats between the first half of 2002 and 2003.

40. Although public revenue flows improved significantly from 238,691 billion to 283,743 billion leones between 2000 and 2003, the Government continues to depend heavily on concessional funding from donors. High security-related expenditures and salary increases continue to put pressure on the budget, while the strong demand for imports and increases in oil prices have resulted in a depreciation of the leone and a corresponding increase in inflation, which reached approximately 10 per cent in 2003, compared to a negative rate of 2 per cent in 2002.

41. Private sector investment is increasing but still remains well below the level required to generate sorely needed jobs. Poor infrastructure remains a major impediment to the expansion of the agricultural, manufacturing and service sectors and a disincentive to investment.

D. Human rights

42. The overall human rights situation in Sierra Leone has improved since the end of the war in early 2002. Steps are being taken to increase access to justice, although major challenges remain in this area. Substantial improvements in the conditions of detention in police stations and prisons have been achieved due to regular monitoring. Similar monitoring of magistrate courts has also had a positive impact on the backlog of cases pending before the courts. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has completed its work and is now finalizing its report, which is expected to be published in May 2004. Many Sierra Leoneans acknowledge that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has had the desired cathartic effect. However, views are somewhat divided on whether the work of the Special Court will have a similar healing impact.

43. Despite the above-mentioned gains, there are key human rights issues that need to continue to be monitored and addressed. In particular, the causes and effects of the human rights crisis emanating from a decade of war are yet to be adequately addressed. In this context, many Sierra Leonean and international stakeholders have expressed concern about the human rights implications of the weak capacity of the country's justice system. This and other challenges, coupled with corrupt practices, impede the effective, efficient and equitable delivery of justice.

44. Reform of the justice sector needs to be pursued with the aim of ensuring access to justice for the poor, rural communities and vulnerable segments of the society, in particular women and children. The United Kingdom-sponsored Safety, Security and Access to Justice programme contributes to these important objectives through support for building the capacity of the justice sector. However, concern has also been expressed about the lack of progress on law review and reform. Old laws that include gender and other forms of discrimination are still on the books. In addition, the Government needs assistance on law reporting. Judicial authorities continue to have little or no access at all to current legislation and jurisprudence. The Minister of Justice and the Attorney-General informed the assessment mission that the last law report was issued in 1973 and emphasized that the publication of the country's laws is vital to the promotion of the rule of law.

45. Violence against women, including sexual exploitation, as well as discrimination against women in law and in practice and the low rate of participation of women and youth in the political and administrative affairs of the country, needs to be addressed.

46. In the light of the foregoing, restoring respect for the rule of law and human rights remains a key priority in Sierra Leone. The primary responsibility of the State to promote and protect human rights and the role of the Sierra Leonean people to keep a close watch needs to be enhanced. Civil society is still weak and requires continued mentoring. To that end, in addition to monitoring, investigation and reporting, the human rights interventions of the international community in Sierra Leone at this stage must emphasize capacity-building and the transfer of responsibility for human rights promotion and protection to the Government and the people of Sierra Leone.

E. Political and related security aspects

47. Discussions with representatives of Sierra Leonean civil society and opposition political parties left the assessment team with the impression that the Government and its partners need to do more to sensitize the public in regard to the significant progress made towards consolidating stability, laying the foundations of good governance and promoting economic and social recovery as described above. This important progress is being increasingly overshadowed by the perception among many Sierra Leoneans that the political class may be reverting to its old self-serving ways and that the root causes of the conflict are not being adequately addressed. Citing many concerns, including high poverty levels, the political and economic marginalization of certain segments of society, widespread unemployment and other economic difficulties, a number of Sierra Leonean and international stakeholders felt that the current political and economic situation in the country very much resembles that which existed on the eve of the outbreak of the conflict in 1991. Needless to say, a return to the status quo ante would sow the seeds of renewed instability.

48. At the same time, there are others who believe that Sierra Leone may be falling victim to its own success. According to this school of thought, the remarkable peace that has prevailed in Sierra Leone under the umbrella security that UNAMSIL has continued to provide since the elections in 2002 has raised very high expectations among the population, expectations that cannot be met at present due to the limited capacity of the economy and the weak State institutions. Whereas security was the major preoccupation only a year ago, youth unemployment and other economic difficulties facing the country, including soaring commodity prices, and matters relating to the administration of justice have become the most burning issues.

49. The Government is taking some measures to address some of these challenges. These include visits by President Kabbah and members of his Cabinet to the provinces to explain to rural populations the steps being taken to address their concerns; the convening of Cabinet meetings in the provincial capitals; the holding of meetings of the National Recovery Committee in each of the 12 districts, as well as in the western area, with the participation of Cabinet members, donors and local stakeholders; and the conduct of the forthcoming local elections. Furthermore, a governmental committee has been established to look into the problem of rising prices. The Anti-Corruption Commission has been functioning, but its effectiveness is hampered by a lack of resources and the capacity constraints that impede the effective functioning of the justice system. As of December 2003, the Anti-Corruption Commission had investigated 352 allegations, and 57 cases had been referred to the Attorney-General for prosecution, of which more than 50 per cent are before the courts. The Government is also endeavouring to address youth unemployment.

50. The Special Court trials, which are scheduled to begin in March 2004 and conclude in 2005, are widely considered a potential source of instability. Some elements of the former Civil Defence Force (CDF) who are opposed to the indictment of Sam Hinga Norman, the former Internal Affairs Minister and National Coordinator of CDF, could seek to disrupt the work of the Court through violent activities. Although the group was disarmed, it is believed that its command and control structures remain intact, especially in the east. For this reason, some observers believe that CDF could be capable of mobilizing a credible force. Others maintain that any attack against the Court by such a force is unlikely to be

successful in the presence of UNAMSIL, and that the group lacks sufficient organization and resources to mount a serious threat to the Government.

51. Another potential internal threat to stability, identified by both Sierra Leonean and international stakeholders, is the possible disaffection within RSLAF resulting from poor conditions of service, the ongoing restructuring exercise and residual support from some elements for Johnny Paul Koroma, the former leader of the ex-Sierra Leone Army/Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, who has been indicted by the Special Court. These factors give many Sierra Leoneans reasons to doubt the loyalty of the armed forces.

52. As indicated in paragraphs 29 and 30 above, there are also potential external threats to Sierra Leone's stability, including the situation in Liberia. In this regard, it is widely felt that until UNMIL is fully deployed in the Liberian counties contiguous to the Sierra Leonean border and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme is completed, the border area will require continued robust monitoring from the Sierra Leonean side. There is also considerable unease about the influence that the exiled former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, continues to wield in the country. He still has a large following and business interests in Liberia, and he could attempt to use the Sierra Leonean combatants who fought for him to destabilize Sierra Leone and disrupt the work of the Special Court.

53. Another potential flashpoint is the continued presence of Guinean troops in the Sierra Leonean border village of Yenga, which Guinea has occupied since 2000, when it helped to fight the Revolutionary United Front and Guinean rebels who were operating in the area. The two Governments have been conducting a dialogue on the matter since 2003, but there has been no further progress despite an agreement to establish a technical committee to look into the demarcation of the segment of the border in question. However, President Kabbah informed the assessment team that his Guinean counterpart considered this to be a minor issue that would be resolved soon.

54. The assessment team shares the widely held view that the extended presence of UNAMSIL after the 2002 national elections has been a major stabilizing factor, preventing renewed instability in Sierra Leone, and that in the short term the potential for unrest remains real as a result of the internal and external factors identified above, even with the presence of a United Nations peacekeeping force.

III. The way forward in addressing immediate challenges

55. The assessment mission looked into possible remedial action that could be taken by the Government and its partners, in the interim period between now and the termination of the UNAMSIL mandate in December 2004, in order to accelerate further progress on the benchmarks, minimize the potential threats to stability and lay the ground for shifting primary responsibility for security and national recovery to national institutions.

56. In this regard, on the political front, it is important for the Government to continue to reach out to the general populace to sensitize them on the progress made in consolidating peace and national recovery and to explain the measures it is taking to address the pressing economic and social challenges, in order to dispel the widespread misperceptions on key national issues. The Government and various

national and international stakeholders will continue to have access to Radio UNAMSIL to disseminate such information.

57. At the same time, concrete action must be seen to be taken in addressing the root causes of the conflict. In this context, the Government's efforts to encourage potential investors, in particular in the agriculture and mining sectors, in order to create employment opportunities for youth, deserve continued support. The Government should also intensify efforts, supported by the United Nations country team and other partners, to fulfil the remaining Consultative Group benchmarks in 2004, including the preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

58. UNAMSIL will continue to assist the Government in preparing the local elections scheduled to take place in May 2004. Considering the potential for such elections to generate political violence, it is essential to ensure that the preparations by the national authorities are transparent and that the Sierra Leone police put into place the necessary security arrangements. In this respect, a threat assessment was conducted by UNAMSIL and, in close coordination with the Sierra Leone police, a security plan has been drawn up to address any emergency situation that may arise.

59. With regard to the security sector, the Government has identified its most immediate priorities for 2004, which include the need to ensure that the provincial and district security committees are fully established and functioning by December 2004; follow-up training for new police recruits and providing accommodation to facilitate the deployment of the Sierra Leone police, particularly in areas along the borders with Liberia and Guinea; completing Operation Pebu, and meeting the mobility and communications requirements of RSLAF. As stated in chapter II above, the Government has also indicated the resources needed in order to accomplish these priorities and has appealed to the United Nations to consider donating some of UNAMSIL's equipment to meet the above shortfalls. It is hoped that Member States may consider providing the assistance required in this vital area.

60. It is equally important for the Government to continue to pay close attention to the delicate issue of boosting the morale and loyalty of the personnel in its security sector, particularly by sensitizing both the army and police on the ongoing reforms and the resource constraints referred to above, and by reviewing the conditions of service of the men and women in uniform. The Government should also continue taking measures to ensure the existence of a coherent security sector in which RSLAF and the Sierra Leone police work in harmony.

61. UNDP and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have been supporting a project to expand the capacity of the Hastings Police Training School. The UNDP-funded project was completed and handed over to the Sierra Leone police in February 2004, while the United Kingdom-funded project is expected to be completed in March. The expanded capacity of the school will make it possible this year to increase the number of police recruits trained from the current 400 per course to 600 per course. It is expected that a total of 1,800 new recruits will be trained by UNAMSIL and the Commonwealth team between March and December 2004.

62. On the subregional front, it is imperative for the Mano River Union countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) to resume dialogue aimed at building subregional security structures and revitalizing the Mano River Union secretariat. UNAMSIL will continue to work closely with UNHCR and IOM both to monitor

and support the Government of Sierra Leone in preparing its plans for receiving, resettling and reintegrating Sierra Leonean ex-combatants and their families who are expected to be repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia and to carry out the repatriation of Liberian combatants who are currently in internment camps in Sierra Leone.

63. Additionally, UNAMSIL, UNMIL and the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) are already making considerable efforts to establish solid mechanisms for cross-border and inter-mission cooperation in order to pursue an enhanced regional approach in implementing their respective mandates. Regular meetings among the Heads of Mission and Force Commanders of the three operations are beginning to establish the mechanisms for joint planning and sharing of information. All three Missions are currently focusing on coordination and joint planning on issues relating to disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration, cross-border liaison and information-sharing.

64. Some of these initiatives are still in the early stages. As they gather momentum, it will be essential to provide them with proper support, including through the setting-up of joint mission analysis cells manned jointly by the military and political elements of the three Missions to provide information at the appropriate level. Significant progress has already been made in the sharing of assets, as exemplified by the support extended by UNAMSIL for the setting-up of both MINUCI and UNMIL.

65. For the near future, there are a number of farther-reaching proposals under discussion by the three Missions to facilitate cross-border operations, including the possibility of "hot pursuit" operations, joint air patrolling, shared border responsibility, the establishment of a subregional reserve force and joint planning for the repatriation of foreign combatants. Many of these ideas may be achievable, but they have complex legal, political and operational implications requiring careful study. In addition, they would depend on political will, particularly on the part of troop contributors, and, of course, the consent of the respective host Governments. I therefore intend to request UNAMSIL, UNMIL and the envisaged United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, in consultation with the United Nations Office in West Africa, to conduct, as a matter of priority, a detailed study of these issues and to prepare proposals that would enable me to submit recommendations to the Security Council by the end of 2004.

66. The assessment team examined the possibility of UNMIL playing a more proactive role in the protection of the border area at this stage, in order to reduce the demands on the Sierra Leonean side. However, the team concluded that while this approach would be highly desirable, the differing security requirements of the two countries, the broader issues, particularly the need to build up the capacity of the Sierra Leonean security sector, and the differing priorities of each Mission would present obstacles in the short term, at least until mid-2005. Nonetheless, UNAMSIL and UNMIL will continue to actively develop closer coordination between their respective operations.

IV. Options for the period beyond December 2004

67. As indicated in my report to the Security Council of 5 September 2002 (S/2002/987), the ultimate goal of the UNAMSIL drawdown plan is to ensure a gradual, phased and deliberate transfer of responsibility for the security of Sierra Leone from the United Nations to the Government of Sierra Leone. To that end, there is unanimity among both Sierra Leonean and international stakeholders that with the planned completion of the UNAMSIL drawdown in December 2004, the Mission's mandate should be terminated, so that primary responsibility for national security reverts to the Government. At the same time, there is recognition that the key security benchmarks will probably not be fully met by December 2004 and that the gains made in consolidating the peace are still fragile.

68. In the light of the foregoing, the assessment mission looked into a number of options, including (a) the complete withdrawal of UNAMSIL, leaving United Nations agencies and other partners to continue to assist the Government's peace consolidation efforts and bilateral partners to support the security sector; (b) the possible extension of the mandate of UNAMSIL in its present form beyond December 2004 with a large military and police component; and (c) the retention of a reconfigured, residual United Nations peacekeeping presence.

69. All national and international stakeholders, without exception, emphasized the need to maintain a residual post-UNAMSIL peacekeeping presence to accompany the transition to national primacy. They were of the view that such a presence should have the capacity to assist Sierra Leone to effectively assume its full responsibilities in the security sector, as well as to reassure the general population, provide deterrence against potential threats to stability and security support for the Special Court, backstop the Sierra Leone police and RSLAF in protecting the volatile eastern border and monitor the political and security situation with a view to providing early warning on potentially destabilizing developments.

70. The post-UNAMSIL presence would also address some core tasks unfinished by UNAMSIL, including continued support for the training of the Sierra Leone police and monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation, as well as capacity-building support for national human rights organizations. However, many of the other remaining tasks, especially those pertaining to the reintegration of ex-combatants, would be assumed by United Nations programmes and agencies, which are better equipped for long-term capacity-building functions. In addition, it is envisaged that the tasks relating to the consolidation of State authority, restoration of Government control over diamond mining, and child protection would be jointly assumed by the United Nations agencies and the proposed follow-on mission.

V. Recommended residual United Nations peacekeeping presence

71. In deciding on the most appropriate option, it would be essential to strike the necessary balance between the overriding necessity to transfer primary responsibility for national security to the Government of Sierra Leone and the equally important responsibility of the United Nations to disengage from the country in a manner that ensures that the key security benchmarks designed to facilitate long-term security and stability are met, and thus protect the hard-won peace in

Sierra Leone. To that end, the course of action set out below is proposed, taking into account the findings of the assessment mission.

A. Drawdown of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

72. The UNAMSIL drawdown plan should be adjusted in order to avoid a steep drop in the Mission's military strength in the remaining phases of the withdrawal process. In this regard, it is recommended that the reduction of the military strength be conducted gradually from the present level of 11,500 to 5,000 during the period from June to 31 December 2004.

B. Proposed military component of a follow-on mission

73. Following the termination of the UNAMSIL mandate on 31 December 2004, a new follow-on mission would be established, whose primary purpose would be to provide back-up security and accompany the transition to national primacy until the capacity of the Government's security sector is adequately developed. Out of the 5,000 troops remaining from UNAMSIL, some 1,500 military personnel from force headquarters (including the guard and administration company; Sectors East and West headquarters; the Ukrainian transportation and maintenance unit; the Bangladeshi signals unit; and the level III hospital) would be retained for a period not exceeding two months, in order to facilitate uninterrupted logistical support and a seamless transition to the new mission.

74. The key tasks of the military component of the proposed post-UNAMSIL peacekeeping mission would focus on three key geographical areas, namely, the west of Sierra Leone, including Freetown; the centre of the country, which is the CDF stronghold; and the east, specifically the border and sensitive diamond-mining areas. With regard to the west, the primary task would be to provide support for the security of the Special Court. However, it would also be essential to include a limited capability to back up the Sierra Leone police in the event of major security incidents of a magnitude that goes beyond the police force's capability, particularly in and around Freetown. The military component would also need the capacity to provide security for United Nations facilities and personnel, including military observers.

75. In the centre, the requirements would include ensuring an essential deterrent presence against any possible attempt to destabilize the work of the Special Court or the Government; backstopping the Sierra Leone police in maintaining internal security; providing a capacity for the security of United Nations personnel and property; and reinforcement of the western and eastern areas. The troops deployed in the centre would act as the force reserve and give the new mission quick reaction capacity and the essential operational flexibility. Thus, there would be a requirement for the force to be capable of operating in other parts of the country to ensure the extraction of United Nations military observers in times of emergency.

76. In the east, the requirements are somewhat different. Notwithstanding the emphasis on Sierra Leone police and RSLAF primacy, there will still be a need to compensate for their lack of capacity to fully monitor the border and maintain appropriate levels of security in other parts of the country. Consequently, arrangements for a much greater degree of joint planning and joint operations would

be necessary. However, these arrangements would still put the Government in the lead.

77. Initially, in consultation with UNAMSIL, the assessment mission had considered that the minimum force size would be a small brigade consisting of three battalions of reduced strength plus United Nations military observers, aviation and essential enablers. However, this option was quickly discounted as being too inflexible, as it would inhibit the force's responsiveness. The preferred option is similar in structure, but with three robust standard battalions. The force size would be 3,250 troops (including 66 staff officers), plus 141 United Nations military observers to be retained out of the 230 currently deployed to UNAMSIL. The headquarters would be located in Freetown, and the battalion deployed in the west would be split between Freetown and Hastings. The second battalion, to be deployed in the east, would be based in Kenema, while the third battalion, assigned to the centre, would be based in Bo.

78. The 141 military observers would work closely with district and provincial security committees in monitoring the overall security situation, patrolling the border and diamond-mining areas, providing early warning, monitoring the emerging Government security sector capability and ensuring that the force headquarters was kept informed.

79. The military observers would operate as part of a single chain of command, answerable to the force headquarters, but functioning in conjunction with the battalions and with their support. They would be deployed at team sites in small groups. It is anticipated that it would be possible to reduce the number of United Nations military observers once the mission was fully established and certain benchmarks were achieved, particularly as the Government's own security capability will be increasing through the development of the provincial and district security committees.

C. Civilian police component

80. It would be essential to retain some United Nations civilian police personnel as part of the proposed follow-on mission, in order to assist the Sierra Leone police to recruit and train an additional 1,800 police cadets so that it would achieve its target pre-war strength of 9,500 officers. The United Nations civilian police officers would also continue and complete the ongoing training of trainers programme, conduct in-service training for some 4,000 Sierra Leone police officers who would be deployed in the provinces, and conduct mentoring and field coaching for the newly graduated police personnel, whose training period has been reduced under the current accelerated recruitment and training period. Additionally, the United Nations civilian police component would continue to work closely with the Commonwealth team in supporting the development of the specialist units of the Sierra Leone police.

81. The tasks described above require the retention of some 80 out of the present 130 United Nations civilian police personnel. Of the 80 officers, nine, including the Police Commissioner and his/her Deputy, would be deployed at the headquarters for the follow-on mission; five police trainers at the Hastings Police Training School; three trainers and two mentors at each of the three regional training centres, at Bo, Kenema and Makeni; and five members to each of the two key areas in Freetown

(Central and Harbour), as well as in Port Loko, Moyamba, Lungi and Koidu. A total of 15 specialist advisers and six strategic advisers would be deployed at Sierra Leone police headquarters in Freetown.

D. Civilian components

82. In consultation with UNAMSIL and the United Nations country team, a number of tasks currently performed by UNAMSIL that could be assumed by other United Nations agencies by the end of 2004 were identified. In this connection, with the official closure of the programme for the reintegration of ex-combatants, the UNAMSIL disarmament, demobilization and reintegration unit will be phased out and the task of supporting the long-term community-based reintegration programmes and monitoring the overall impact of the reintegration programme on ex-combatants and communities will be assumed by the transitional support teams created by the country team, while UNDP will continue to address the issue of the proliferation of small arms under its Arms for Development programme.

83. However, it would be essential to retain a disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration adviser in the Office of my Special Representative to ensure that the follow-on mission had the capacity to monitor the repatriation, reception, resettlement and reintegration of Sierra Leonean combatants who are currently in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. The adviser would also give the follow-on mission the capacity to contribute to joint efforts with the Missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire to monitor and address the issue of the cross-border flow of combatants. In this regard, as indicated earlier, UNHCR and IOM will assist the Government in receiving and resettling ex-combatants repatriated from Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

84. The UNAMSIL electoral unit would be similarly phased out after the local elections scheduled to take place in May 2004. Under its programme for promoting good governance, UNDP, working together with the follow-on mission and other concerned international partners, would continue to monitor elections-related issues and support the National Electoral Commission, leading up to the 2007 national elections. This would include supporting a nationwide constituency delimitation exercise after the conduct of the national census.

85. Given their long-term nature, some of the tasks currently performed by the UNAMSIL civil affairs unit, particularly those relating to building the capacity of Government structures at the district and provincial levels, will be assumed by the United Nations country team. Specifically, these long-term tasks include capacity-building and technical support for district offices and local councils, as well as monitoring and supporting the newly elected district councils and the decentralization process as a whole.

86. However, it would be necessary to retain in the proposed follow-on mission a reduced number of civil affairs officers who would remain in key areas in the provinces to continue to monitor and facilitate the peaceful resolution of community disputes, including chiefdom boundary disputes, and support the Government's efforts in the area of youth empowerment. For this purpose, civil affairs officers would be deployed in the three regional capitals of Bo, Kenema and Makeni, as well as in Freetown, Kailahun, Koidu and Moyamba. The current staff complement of 11

civil affairs officers and 10 United Nations Volunteers would be reduced to 6 international civil affairs officers and 5 United Nations Volunteers.

87. Both Sierra Leonean and international stakeholders emphasized the need to maintain a strong United Nations human rights presence in Sierra Leone to monitor, investigate and report on the human rights situation in the country. In order to ensure the effective transfer of competencies and skills to national human rights personnel and organizations for the continuation of human rights monitoring and promotion, the human rights unit of the follow-on mission would emphasize the inclusion of national personnel in those activities. It would also involve local non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations in conducting periodic assessments of detention facilities, as well as in monitoring and investigation. In this context, the current 15 international human rights officers assigned to UNAMSIL would be reduced to five, who would be supported by a few United Nations Volunteers and national staff. The human rights officers would be deployed in Freetown, as well as in the Kenema, Koinadugu and Moyamba districts.

88. The proposed mission would require the support of a public information unit in order to meet its public information needs, disseminate information on the mandate and purpose of the mission, sensitize the population on the Government's primary responsibility for national security and national recovery, and disseminate information aimed at the promotion and consolidation of peace. Given the limited capacity of local radio stations, it would be necessary to retain the current United Nations radio station to support the proposed mission's public information programme.

89. With regard to the leadership of the follow-on mission, it would be important to maintain a strong Office of my Special Representative, supported by a Deputy Special Representative, who would also serve as the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, in order to preserve the vital link between the mission and the United Nations country team. The military component would be headed by a two-star force commander.

90. The Office of my Special Representative would be supported by a political, policy and planning unit whose main functions would be to assist him in meeting his reporting obligations to headquarters, monitor and analyse political developments, encourage the Government to maintain dialogue with opposition political parties and civil society, monitor the overall peace consolidation process and promote national reconciliation. There would also be a need to deploy political affairs officers to the east. A requisite number of staff would be assigned to the political, policy and planning unit. My Special Representative would also be supported by a child protection adviser in order to ensure that child protection concerns were taken into account by the follow-on mission, in particular through systematic training and advice on child protection for all military and United Nations civilian police and civilian personnel. At the same time, the posts of gender adviser and HIV/AIDS adviser would be brought under the Office of my Special Representative.

91. It should be noted that wherever United Nations military observers, civil affairs officers, political affairs officers, human rights officers and civilian police personnel were co-deployed, they would function as integrated units and would work in close collaboration with the United Nations country team and its transitional support teams. In order to ensure adequate security for United Nations personnel and assets at the team sites, it could be necessary to increase the mission's civilian

security personnel by a small number as the military component of UNAMSIL completes its drawdown.

E. United Nations country team

92. It is envisaged that the roles of the follow-on mission and the United Nations country team would be complementary. To this end, the country team, with initial funding from UNDP and UNHCR, has established transitional support teams to support the Government in taking the lead in the transition from relief and recovery towards longer-term development and to promote community-driven efforts in areas with large resettling populations. Transitional support teams have so far been established in the three key districts of Kailahun, Kambia and Kono and will be extended to other districts during the course of this year. The teams will draw their resources from United Nations agencies that constitute the United Nations country team.

93. In close collaboration with the Government and longer-term partners, the United Nations country team has identified priority areas that it will continue to support as the transition moves forward. In the area of promoting democratic, accountable and transparent governance, it will provide assistance for public sector management, curbing corruption, electoral reform and the re-establishment of local government. The United Nations country team, together with partners, will also focus on facilitating the timely completion of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, assisting the poorest and most vulnerable in society and monitoring national efforts to improve service delivery, especially in health, education and agriculture.

94. The country team will also continue to build on its initial support for the rehabilitation of the justice system, so as to help improve judicial coverage, especially in the rural areas. Furthermore, it will contribute to the efforts to address the challenge of youth unemployment through support for well-targeted livelihood programmes and microcredit initiatives. In order to support the revitalization of the economy, the country team, along with other partners, will continue to assist the Government to put into place conditions that will encourage investment and trade by the private sector. In addition to the activities of the longer-term development programmes of the European Union, the World Bank and the African Development Bank are coming forward with significant investments in the provision of basic health and education throughout the country.

95. In line with the general drawdown of the United Nations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will also phase out its presence by the end of 2004. A humanitarian officer will, however, be retained in the office of the Resident Coordinator to monitor the humanitarian situation and to ensure a continued early warning capacity and contingency planning. Since May 2003, the country team has worked closely together to prepare for this transition. In this context, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-managed Sierra Leone Information System, which monitors recovery progress in the country, has already been transferred to the Government Development Assistance Coordination Office, which is supported by UNDP.

96. UNICEF will continue to be responsible for the overall protection and well-being of children and will continue to take the lead in providing technical support and advice to the national institutions, advocacy, outreach and assistance in the development of legislation concerning children.

F. Mission support issues

97. On the administrative side, the major challenges would be to manage the three simultaneous processes of supporting the operations of UNAMSIL, planning for the liquidation of the current Mission and putting into place arrangements to support the follow-on mission. With regard to the proposed adjustments to the drawdown plan, UNAMSIL informed the assessment team that current capacity at Sierra Leone's seaport and airport allows the repatriation of a maximum of 2,000 troops and their equipment per month. Discussions are ongoing within the Mission to work out the details of a revised drawdown plan, which takes these constraints into account.

98. With respect to the liquidation of UNAMSIL, the Mission, in consultation with Headquarters, has initiated preparations for an efficient liquidation and transition to the proposed follow-on mission. UNAMSIL has also prepared a preliminary asset-disposal plan, which is expected to be finalized in March. A portion of the assets has provisionally been earmarked for transfer to the Missions in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia and other envisaged peacekeeping operations. It is also important to note that the proposed retention of troops beyond 2004 would require the extension of the initially planned liquidation period to April/May 2005.

99. UNAMSIL headquarters is currently located at Mammy Yoko Hotel, where its lease will expire in February 2005. It is proposed that, in order to minimize disruption to the liquidation activities and to ensure a seamless and cost-effective transition to the follow-on operations, both UNAMSIL liquidation activities and the headquarters of the follow-on mission would relocate to an appropriate secured place in Freetown. Hastings will continue to serve as the logistics base, where all UNAMSIL assets can be housed and shipped at the appropriate time.

100. In addition to its reliance on the United Nations for its security needs, the Special Court continues to depend on UNAMSIL helicopter assets for the movement of its personnel to and from the interior of the country to conduct investigations, visits to witnesses and its outreach programme. Under the present agreement with UNAMSIL, the Mission also provides all other logistics support to the Court on a reimbursable basis, with the exception of the provision of electricity and water. Considering that the Special Court is now fully operational, UNAMSIL has proposed that the Court should also establish full operational independence, with the exception of helicopter assets, which the follow-on mission could continue to make available for the movement of the Court's personnel to the interior of the country, without prejudicing its own operational capacity. However, it may be necessary for the Court and the follow-on mission to discuss a new memorandum of understanding on such support.

G. Duration of the follow-on mission

101. A number of milestones expected to be reached in 2005 would require the strength and tasks of the proposed follow-on mission to be kept under review. To this end, the assessment mission identified specific benchmarks that would guide such a review. The conclusion of the work of the Special Court is one such milestone that would make it possible to consider adjustments to the battalions to be deployed in Bo and in the west. In this connection, officials of the Special Court have indicated that it is expected to complete its work during the second half of 2005.

102. Another key benchmark would be the attainment of the necessary capacity for RSLAF to assume full and effective responsibility for the external security of the country. There are three important facets to this benchmark. First is the completion of Operation Pebu, which is expected to take place in mid-2005, if the funding shortfall referred to in paragraph 13 above is met in a timely manner. The second aspect is the acquisition of the requisite communications and mobility assets by RSLAF, which also depends on the availability of donor support. The third is the completion of the first IMATT-supported training cycle for RSLAF, which is expected to take place by November 2005. These factors would give RSLAF sufficient capacity in the eastern border area to warrant a scaling down of support from the follow-on mission. Additionally, the full deployment of UNMIL and consolidation of the security arrangements in the areas of Liberia close to Sierra Leone's border constitute an important benchmark, which is also expected to reduce the potential security threat and thus warrant a review of the level of support for RSLAF there.

103. Another important milestone will be the attainment of the full strength of the Sierra Leone police (9,500 officers), which is expected in mid 2005, and the comprehensive deployment of police personnel throughout the country with sufficient density to ensure internal security. It is also expected that by the end of 2004, the Government's provincial and district security committees will be functioning more effectively.

104. In the light of the foregoing, it is envisaged that the proposed follow-on mission would remain in Sierra Leone until the end of 2005. However, a review of the benchmarks identified above would be conducted by mid-2005, with a view to making the necessary adjustments in the military, civilian police and other components of the mission.

VI. Observations

105. Sierra Leone is at a crossroads. The carefully calibrated exit strategy for UNAMSIL that was approved by the Security Council after the national elections in 2002 has yielded significant benefits for the country. In particular, the extended presence of the Mission has created a stable security environment and given the Government the opportunity to consolidate the peace and promote national recovery. I would like to commend President Kabbah and his Government for their efforts to make the most of this unique window of opportunity.

106. The most significant achievements during this peace consolidation phase have included the extension of State authority throughout the country, the completion of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, the successful launching of the work of the Special Court, the completion of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the successful resettlement of internally displaced persons and returnees. Considerable progress has also been made in implementing the benchmarks that are intended to build the capacity of the Government to assume responsibility for national security and recovery, and thus make it possible for UNAMSIL to begin disengaging without putting the hard-won peace and stability at risk. Furthermore, the security environment in the subregion has improved with the recent deployment of UNMIL, and the promising prospects of convening a Mano River Union summit.

107. At the same time, progress in many of those areas remains fragile. RSLAF, especially, remains a weak point in the overall security structure. The serious shortfalls facing the armed forces in logistics and infrastructure will not make it possible for the Government to assume effective responsibility for the country's external security by the time the UNAMSIL mandate is terminated in December. The Sierra Leone police force has achieved remarkable progress in building its capacity, but is yet to attain its full strength and needs considerable support in constructing its police stations and accommodation in the provinces. In addition, most State structures are yet to attain the capacity to deliver essential services to the population. The country's budget is heavily dependent on donor support, and the economy still lacks the capability to generate employment for the large numbers of youth, including former combatants, who are restive. In addition, the Government needs to redouble its efforts to tackle the root causes of the conflict, in particular by strengthening anti-corruption measures and fighting poverty.

108. There is a unanimous view among both Sierra Leoneans and international stakeholders that the progress made so far warrants a carefully managed transfer of responsibility for national security to the Government. The proposals presented in chapters II to IV above are therefore intended to ensure that the forthcoming final phases of the drawdown of UNAMSIL are calibrated in such a way that they would dovetail into the eventual smooth transition to national primary responsibility for security. Moreover, the proposed extension of the United Nations peacekeeping presence in Sierra Leone into 2005 would provide more time to complete key residual tasks of UNAMSIL, allow the Special Court to complete its work and give the country extra space to further stabilize and recover.

109. I therefore would like to invite the Security Council to consider the recommendations contained in chapter V above and authorize the establishment of a residual United Nations peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone, comprising 3,250 troops, plus 141 United Nations military observers and 80 United Nations civilian police personnel, for a period of one year, until 31 December 2005, as well as an appropriate adjustment in the current drawdown plan of UNAMSIL, which would include the retention of 1,500 troops from relevant support units of UNAMSIL, for a period of two months, to facilitate a seamless transition to the follow-on mission.

110. In making these recommendations at this stage, I am mindful of the need to ensure a seamless and well-organized transition from UNAMSIL to the follow-on mission, in a timely manner. For political, operational and logistical reasons, it is essential that the Security Council take an early decision on these recommendations.

In the meantime, I strongly appeal to donors to make available to RSLAF and the Sierra Leone police the sorely needed communications, transport and other equipment, as well as to provide assistance in the area of accommodation. The Secretariat, in consultation with the Government of Sierra Leone, would be ready to provide donors specific information on the Government's needs in this regard.

111. It is my intention to keep developments in Sierra Leone under close review and to make the necessary adjustments to the follow-on mission as the milestones identified in paragraphs 101 to 103 above are reached.

112. In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to my Special Representative, Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, who took up his post in Sierra Leone on 12 January 2004, as well as to the civilian and military personnel of UNAMSIL and the United Nations country team, for the excellent contribution they are making to the efforts to restore lasting peace in Sierra Leone. I also wish to commend the humanitarian community for the critical work it is performing.